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Moscow Moves Rapidly In Defections to the U.S.

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

When a Soviet agent defects, as Vitaly Yurchenko is said to have done before flying home yesterday, the Soviet Union mounts a standard counteroffensive intended to minimize the security damage and lure the defector back, according to intelligence specialists and former defectors.

Typically, they say, the effort involves attempts to reach the defector, usually by invoking a consular agreement guaranteeing access to each country's citizens.

Whether such an attempt was made in the case of Mr. Yurchenko, who says he was kidnapped by American agents, is not known. A knowledgeable official said it was safe to assume that Soviet representatives had tried to reach Mr. Yurchenko. The official said he did not know the result of any such effort.

Freedom of Movement

Because Mr. Yurchenko seemed to be held loosely enough for him to walk away from dinner with his escort from the Central Intelligence Agency last Saturday, the official said, the K.G.B. man may also have been free enough to make contact with Soviet diplomats.

"Defectors are not prisoners," the American official said. "After a while here the security is up to them."

According to a former C.I.A. officer, Harry Rositzke, the pattern of a defection case is often set in the first day or two. Before the Soviet authorities may realize that their man is missing, he said, American agents hurriedly debrief the defector to obtain as much intelligence as possible and act on it before the Russians take measures.

Mr. Rositzke, who left the C.I.A. in 1970 after nearly 25 years, said defectors often held back information as insurance for continued protection.

"Especially if he came over a little reluctantly," Mr. Rositzke said, "he would not give away the crown jewels right away. One guy we had held back for two and a half years."

Drugging Charge Is Derided

Mr. Rositzke derided Mr. Yurchenko's contention that he had been drugged and abducted.

"If anyone starts kidnapping — boy, do you get it back in your face," he said, likening the relations between opposing intelligence forces to those between national leaders. "You don't assassinate heads of state because others would be quick to reciprocate."

The first step of the Soviet Union, the United States or any other nation that fears an intelligence official may have fled or defected is to protect and shift undercover agents who may be endangered, specialists said.

As with most other defections, Mr. Yurchenko's case was not made public at the time he was said to have come over to the American side in Rome last May. Presumably, officials said, the Russians inquired whether he was being held by the Americans and, if previous cases are a guide, the Americans refused to say.

"They will come in and bang their fists on the door and the counter and demand to see him but we are not going to cough him up right away," an American said.

Defection Cases Are Special

He acknowledged that the United States and the Soviet Union had pledged to allow access to citizens. But, the agreement aside, he said, "defection cases are different."

"With a real hot potato," he added, "we don't even acknowledge we have him."

However, officials said, defectors are encouraged, as soon as they feel comfortable, to meet with Soviet representatives — in the presence of Americans — to give assurances that they are not being held against their will.

One such confrontation was described by Arkady N. Shevchenko, the former Soviet diplomat.

In a book, "Breaking With Moscow," published this year, he recalled meeting with Oleg A. Troyanovsky, the Soviet delegate to the United Nations, and with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, the Ambassador to the United States, in the office of a lawyer, Ernest Gross, after the defection became known.

Mr. Shevchenko wrote of Mr. Dobrynin:

"Employing the intimate form of 'you' that Russian friends normally use with one another, he expressed only concern for me, bewilderment at my action. 'Arkady, we have known each other for many years. I don't believe that all these years you have acted contrary to your convictions. How can it be explained?' "

At the end, Mr. Shevchenko wrote, the two diplomats handed over two letters from his family, "arguing that I had made a mistake, urging me to come home to Moscow."

Such letters and arranged telephone calls to family members in the Soviet Union are a standard feature of efforts to win back defectors, said Bill Geimer, Mr. Shevchenko's present lawyer.

Mr. Geimer said there was an unconfirmed report that Mr. Yurchenko's American hosts had arranged for him to talk by telephone with his 16-year-old son in Moscow and that this may have been a tactical mistake.

In Washington, Yelena Mitrokhin, who left her husband, a Soviet Embassy official, to defect in 1978, said in an interview that she knew Mr. Yurchenko and that she had heard he might have been depressed in American custody over a lack of opportunity to speak Russian and an "inability to share his feelings," including a reportedly unhappy liaison with a woman in Canada.

Mrs. Mitrokhin, who appeared Tuesday on the ABC News "Nightline" program, said she had tried to see Mr. Yurchenko, but she said that while the Federal Bureau of Investigation approved the idea, "the C.I.A. bureaucracy is never on time."

She said that after her defection she agreed to meet at the State Department with Soviet representatives.

"They put a lot of pressure on me, including some threats," she said.